

Testimony on S.44—Flexibility in Early College Enrollment Cap

Senate Education Committee

February 12, 2015

Thank you for this invitation. And special thanks to Senators Westman and Cummings for taking to heart our concerns at Johnson State College and the Vermont State Colleges.

By all accounts the Early College Program has enjoyed a successful first year at Johnson State. It has taken an important place among the individualized pathways made possible by Act 77. Professors are thrilled to have Early College Program students in their classes. And the students have enjoyed great success: 100% fall-to-spring retention and impressive, fall semester grade results, averaging 3.6.

Demand has been high for the program. We have worked hard at our offerings for new students, and a very dedicated staff, led by Ms. Joye Lyon, has planned well for Early College students, starting by informing many constituencies about the program. This year we enrolled 20 qualified students in the program, exceeding our quota of 18. We hoped to fulfill the intent of the legislation by using slots unused elsewhere in the system.

These wonderful students come from Mt. Mansfield, Hazen (2), BFA-Fairfax (3), BFA-St. Albans, Mississquoi Valley, Harwood, Richford, Craftsbury Academy, Home School Programs (2), People's Academy (4), and Lamoille Union High School (3, including 2 from Green Mountain Tech and Career Center).

Two took Sen. Doyle's Observing Legislative Process course and are currently doing internships at the State House this semester! Another is in the college Chorale.

Already 34 applications have been received for next fall; and Johnson State already has 18 deposits, with several, highly qualified acceptances on a "wait list."

I might add that guidance counselors are upset that the Early College Program is filled. Just today Ms. Lyon received another call from one, wondering if his students will have a place in Johnson's ECP. This is a frequent occurrence.

Looking ahead, judging from this year's initial experience and what is shaping up for next year, there is a bright future for the Early College Program as one pathway provided by Act 77. To realize that potential, several real-life concerns deserve to be addressed:

- **We need flexibility in the early college enrollment cap of 18 students and urge your support for S.44. We also wish we had the possibility of rolling over unused places from this year to accommodate some of the demand we have received for next.**

And if I may take a minute to go beyond the scope of the proposed legislation:

- Another outstanding issue is how to assure equity of access to Early College, so it is a viable pathway for all Vermonters and not just for academic high-flyers from more affluent backgrounds:
 - High school seniors and their families do not expect the fees (e.g., for orientation and parking, etc.) that are a part of going to college. These can be a burden.
 - Paying for college textbooks can also pose a problem.
 - Meals while on campus can also be a concern, as such a high proportion of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch at their high schools.
 - And finally, since the reach of JSC's Early College Program is broad, and we feel we must offer residential housing options to those who are beyond the range of commuting, financial assistance for paying for housing would be desirable.

To my knowledge, the original legislation did not address these concerns.

Thank you for your interest in Johnson State College, the VSC and the Early College Program.

- Daniel Regan, Dean of Academic Affairs, Johnson State College